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SUBJECT: FORMER INTERIOR MINISTER PONDERS HOW TO COMPETE
WITH SECTARIAN PARTIES, SUGGESTS SADRITES MAY TRY TO
CONTROLMINISTRIES THROUGH MILITIA-BACKED "ADVISERS"

Classified By: Political Counselor Robert Ford,
reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Former Interior Minister Nuri Badran, brother-in-law of former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi, told Poloffs that sectarian parties are the only way to have influence in Iraqi politics today. Moderate Shia like himself must ally themselves with Islamists to have a chance to gain influence, he stated. Badran described a plan by which the Sadrists would get the position of Council of Ministers Secretary-General, and then 35 Sadrist "advisers" to the ministries, working out of the office of the Sadrists Council of Ministers Secretary-General, would flex the Jaysh al-Mahdi muscle to gain influence over most of the ministries. This, Badran said, was a pattern used by Saddam to take effective control of the government.
End Summary.

Sectarian Parties Are the Only Way,

¶2. (C) Former Interior Minister Nuri Badran, brother-in-law of former Prime Minister Ayad Allawi, told Poloffs in his International Zone residence that the only credible political parties in Iraq today are sectarian, and that the best hope was to find a "middle way" to develop moderate trends in the sectarian parties for a future day when Iraqi politics might not be wholly based on sectarian identity. "They only listen to you when you are Shia," he said. Poloffs asked Badran how the moderate trends of sectarian parties might be strengthened. He replied by vaguely referring to seminars and support for media. However, he went on to say that the strategy for moderate politicians should be to work under the radar, not challenging the Islamist parties, but trying to work with them. He said moderates such as himself would try to run with Islamists on the same lists, as this was the only way to get seats in national and provincial parliaments. The moderates would say their role was "to complete the work" of the established Islamist political parties, when in reality they would be pushing a more pragmatic, less religiously oriented program.

¶3. (S) Badran, whose party ran on the slogan that when he was Interior Minister, he did not attack Najaf or Fallujah, confided that shortly before the election, he called his provincial campaign committees and told them that the Shia should vote for the United Iraqi Coalition (List 555) and the Sunnis should vote for Tawafaq, in order for them to preserve their credibility in their respective communities.

¶4. (S) Badran, who is from Basra, was aware of the importance of upcoming provincial elections. He is counting on his strategy to give him time to build a political base. He is also concerned that the Islamist Shia parties that dominate southern Iraqi politics not be given too long a time to gain an irreversible hold on power. He has hope that the Islamist parties will not squelch the hopes of moderates like him. He expressed the appropriate degree of concern when Poloffs pointed out that in the only hard-line Islamist governments in southwest Asia -- Iran and Taliban Afghanistan -- the hard-line Islamist governments crushed moderate secularists like him. He expressed the hope that provincial councils to be elected in 2006 would have terms of less than four years, noting "we need ... one year!"

Government Formation: Sadr Seeking to Recreate
Saddam's Control Structure over Ministries

¶5. (S) On government formation, Badran described how he has tried to play the role of an intermediary among Sadr, SCIRI and independent Shia. He last met Sadr himself five months ago he said, but said he was in close touch with top Sadr aides. He believes that Sadr, in addition to wanting service ministries, also wants the big post of Council of Ministers Secretary-General (CoMSYG). This would give him enormous influence over appointments in the government and would make a Sadrite the unofficial but powerful "Mayor of the Green Zone." (Note: When asked how Badran, a private businessman with money but no official government position, got a house in the International Zone, Badran confided that he had gone to Kudhayr Abbas, then Council of Ministers Secretary General, who had given him

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the house, which at that time was gutted and in ruins. He said he had completely refurbished it at his own expense. He did not describe the terms on which Abbas gave him the house. End note.)

¶6. (S) Badran said Sadr is also looking to get 35 (Badran was firm on the number) counsellors appointed to the Prime Minister's office, one for each ministry. Badran said this would give Sadr the power that Saddam once had, because his "counsellors" would have the power of Sadr's militia behind him. Saddam's counsellors became more powerful than most cabinet ministers, Badran said, and often went on to become ministers themselves. This was how Saddam took over the government, he said.

If I Were Interior Minister...

¶7. (C) Badran had been the first post-liberation Minister of the Interior, but resigned in early 2004 in a corruption scandal. However, he told Poloffs he had been approached by the Sadrites and some Sunnis (NFI) about being Interior Minister again.

¶8. (C) What Iraq needs, Badran said, is to find a way to remove those unredeemable police officers who have Bathist or militia ties. Badran's solution is to offer such officers the status of "On Pension Waiting for Reappointment." These officers would then be offered retraining programs, to give them new skills, a secure income, and hope for the future. This would prevent them from joining the insurgency, militias, or organized crime. A non-partisan committee would establish a list of a dozen or so objective criteria and would be in charge of reappointing officers. This would give the Interior Minister political cover when pressed to hire people.

Comment

¶9. (S) Comment. Badran came into town with his brother-in-law Ayad Allawi and tried to work in a cross-sectarian party, but he, like Ahmad Chalabi, has clearly opted to become a Shia politician. He was properly respectful of all the Shia political leadership. Without his brother-in-law's patronage, he is using money made from his business interests to fund his own political ambitions. He enjoys playing the role of a middleman. His approach to finding a role for moderates in an increasingly sectarian Shia polity is probably too modest to have a chance of success, but it is the only plan that is within his resources. Badran is the first person to describe to us a Sadr plan to gain strong influence in the cabinet through a Sadrist Council of Ministers Secretary-General. Jafari's immediate team has been telling us that they would keep Emad Dhia Khursan in the job (Khursan is new in the Secretary General job, replacing the often-criticized

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Khudhayr Abbas). End comment.
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